



## Press Release

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### **DEVELOPING OUR BRAINS FROM CRADLE TO GRAVE**

Proposals aimed at helping society realise its mental potential at every stage of peoples' lives are contained in a major new report published today by Foresight, the Government's futures think tank.

The study into 'Mental Capital and Wellbeing' looks at how a person's mental resources change through life, as a child, adult and in old age, and identifies factors that can help or hinder their development. The consequences are substantial for individuals, wider society and the economy.

The report concludes that there is a clear case for action across society including by Government, companies and individuals to boost both mental capital and wellbeing. This could reap very high economic and social benefits in the future.

The report, sponsored by the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (DIUS), outlines the findings of an extensive two-year study involving over 400 leading international experts in subjects ranging from neuroscience to economics.

The study defines mental capital as a person's cognitive and emotional resources; how good they are at learning and their "emotional intelligence" such as their social skills and resilience in the face of stress. Mental wellbeing changes from day to day and is linked to personal and social fulfilment.

Its main findings are that:

- Early intervention is crucial in developing and maintaining mental capital and mental wellbeing – whether it's spotting and treating learning difficulties in children and young people or developing biomarkers to diagnose dementia earlier in older people;

- A small increase in levels of wellbeing can produce a large decrease in mental health problems across people of all ages;
- There is substantial scope for improving how to tackle the huge problem of mental-ill-health, which costs up to £77 billion a year for England alone.

Professor John Beddington, the Government's Chief Scientific Adviser and Director of the Foresight Programme, said:

“This report gives us new insights, based on cutting-edge science, into the challenges ahead and how they might be addressed. It contains a range of proposals for society and Government to consider.

“There is good work being done but progress can be made and taxpayers money saved if government departments work together more effectively to tackle these issues.

“Investing to identify and tackle learning difficulties early on and improving the take up of education and learning will result in people getting better jobs. The report has shown that if an individual is fulfilled in their work this positively affects wellbeing, this in turn will see reduced expenditure on the treatment of mental health problems.

“Acting now in a co-ordinated way is even more important as the pressures on our society change – this is particularly pertinent in the current climate. Competition from abroad and uncertain economic times will drive people to work harder and smarter. Both will result in increasing demands made on individuals and the state”.

John Denham, Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills, who is the report's Ministerial sponsor, said:

“I welcome this report which provides new insights and creates fresh opportunities to offer support to individuals, families and organisations in building and sustaining mental capital and good mental health.

“Future prosperity and social justice in the UK will be strengthened by drawing on the mental capital and talents of its citizens and I am pleased this report recognises that the Government is already on the right track in many areas.

“My own department is investing more in skills and training than ever before to ensure all of our people, young and old, can make the most of their talents and abilities, increasing their prosperity and improving their life chances while strengthening the wider economy. And across Government we are driving through reforms in education, health and business to support individuals, their families and communities.

“A range of departments and organisations across Government and more widely are committed to taking forward the project’s findings and I look forward to overseeing the progress of that over the coming year.”

Drawing on over 100 expert papers, the report identifies three key areas which need to be tackled. These are learning in the early years, wellbeing at work, and the ageing population. The study highlights:

### **Learning in the early years**

- An estimated 10 per cent of children have a learning difficulty of some kind;
- Dyslexia and dyscalculia (number blindness) can both substantially reduce lifetime earnings and GCSE achievement, with dyscalculia potentially as common as dyslexia – but frequently undetected;
- Improvements in early detection and intervention would prevent problems developing further and improve educational achievement;
- Teacher training needs to capitalise on new, emerging scientific understanding of child development in areas such as neuroscience and developmental psychology.

### **Wellbeing at work**

- Work related absenteeism accounts for between 10 million to 14 million days lost, costing business around £750 million per annum;
- Presenteeism – where the individual is at work but not productive – could cost the UK around £900 million per year (this is worked out using figures from the US and adjusting to fit the UK work environment);

- Continuously developing our mental capital by training and retraining through our working lives will be crucial to compete in the global market for skills and can improve mental wellbeing;
- New forms of flexible working could help employees meet the conflicting demands of intensification of work and the increased need for people to look after older relatives;
- There should be better integration of primary care and occupational health services to identify early symptoms of stress and mental ill-health which could help people return to work.

### **Ageing population**

- We need to act now – new treatments could take years to become available so protective lifestyles need to be adopted now by the middle aged;
- Addressing dementia is a priority. By 2071 the number of over 65's could nearly double to over 21 million, and those aged 80 could more than treble to 9.5 million
- Treating dementia costs the UK £17 billion a year – this is set to rise to £50 billion a year within 30 years;
- Scientific developments, such as biomarkers could help detect dementia earlier. (Biomarkers are objective biological measures associated with presence of a disease, increased risk for it, or response to treatment. MRI scans are one example). Early detection could help the development of new drugs, improve potential therapeutic benefit of treatment, enhance quality of life for patients and reduce financial burden of health care services in the long term.
- The mental capital of older people is a massive, and under utilised resource. Unlocking this could benefit the wellbeing and prosperity of older people and society as a whole
- We need to ensure wellbeing in the elderly – this could be provided through: better treatment for common mental disorders such as depression, enabling people to engage in paid and unpaid work if they wish, lifelong learning, and through social networking.

As the project's sponsor, DIUS will now take responsibility for the report's recommendations to assist in policy development across government. A report in 12 months time will outline the project's progress including action by other stakeholders.

### **Notes to editors**

1) Download the full report at <http://www.foresight.gov.uk> (only available from Wednesday 22 October) Embargoed copies are available to the media on request.

2) Mental capital refers to a person's cognitive and emotional resources; how the brain processes information (thinking and learning) and their "emotional intelligence" such as their social skills and resilience in the face of stress.

3) Foresight is part of the Government Office for Science (GO Science). Its function is to help Government think systematically about the future. Foresight uses the latest scientific and other evidence to provide signposts for policymakers in tackling future challenges.

4) Foresight reports do not constitute Government policy. Rather, they are intended to inform the strategic and long-term choices facing Government departments, business and us all. The rolling programme of projects is selected by Foresight following wide stakeholder consultation. The projects run for 18 months to 2 years and include 3 main stages: scoping; collecting the evidence base; and providing a series of policy options after analysing how the issue will change in the future. Once a project is agreed, the department with the greatest policy interest in the project is invited to become the sponsoring department and nominate one of its ministers to chair the High Level Stakeholder Group.

5) DIUS brings together the nation's strengths in science, research, universities and colleges to build a dynamic, knowledge-based economy. Its primary role is to drive forward delivery of the Government's long-term vision to make Britain one of the best places in the world for science, research and innovation and to raise the level of education and skills at every level in our economy to give the UK the competitive edge.

6) For further enquires, please contact the GO Science Press Office on 0203 300 8099 / 8126.

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